

Wherefore, what is claimed is:

1. A computer-implemented process for conducting two-way voice communications between a user and a remote party over a communication link using a communication device having a user interface and a display, wherein the remote party speaks but the user does not, comprising using a computer to perform the following process actions:

displaying a menu listing a plurality of potential responses on the display of the communication device, said responses being employed by the user to communicate with the remote party; and

upon selection of one of the responses by the user employing the user interface of the communication device,

accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected response, and

transmitting a playback of the accessed voice snippet to the remote party over the communication link.

2. The process of Claim 1, further comprising displaying at least one additional menu on the display of the communication device upon selection of a response from a currently displayed menu, which together with the original menu form a hierarchy of menus used to construct complete statements when selected responses from each menu displayed are played back in the sequence they were selected.

3. The process of Claim 1, further comprising the process actions of: providing a plurality of backchanneling responses which are selectable by the user via the user interface; and,

upon selection of one of the backchanneling responses by the user,

accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected backchanneling response, and

transmitting a playback of the accessed voice snippet to the remote party over the communication link.

4. The process of Claim 3, wherein the backchanneling responses
5 comprise at least one of (i) Yes, (ii) OK, (iii) No, (iv) Uh-huh, and (v) What?.

5. The process of Claim 1, wherein the process for conducting two-way voice communications is activated manually by the user.

10 6. The process of Claim 1, wherein the process for conducting two-way voice communications is activated automatically whenever a voice communication is initiated by the user.

15 7. The process of Claim 1, wherein the process for conducting two-way voice communications is activated automatically whenever a voice communication is received by the user.

20 8. The process of Claim 1, wherein once activated, said the process for conducting two-way voice communications can be deactivated manually by the user.

25 9. The process of Claim 1, wherein the process action of accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected response comprises accessing a voice snippet recorded by someone other than the user.

10. The process of Claim 1, further comprising the process actions of allowing the user to record voice snippets in their own voice.

30 11. The process of Claim 10, wherein the process action of allowing the user to record voice snippets in their own voice, comprises the actions of:

inputting a command entered by the user via the user interface to initiate a training mode;

inputting a designation of which of the responses the user intends to record a voice snippet for;

- 5 recording the voice of the user reciting the designated response;
assigning the voice recording to the menu associated with the designated response as the voice snippet for that response; and
storing the voice snippet for future playback.

10 12. The process of Claim 10, wherein the process action of allowing the user to record voice snippets in their own voice, comprises the actions of:

inputting a command entered by the user via the user interface to initiate a training mode;

inputting the text of a response the user intends to record a voice snippet for which is entered by the user via the user interface;

15 assigning the inputted text to an unused response location of the menu;

recording the voice of the user reciting the inputted response;

assigning the voice recording to the menu associated with the

20 inputted response as the voice snippet for that response; and
storing the voice snippet for future playback.

13. The process of Claim 1, wherein the voice snippets correspond exactly to the text of its associated response as displayed.

25 14. The process of Claim 1, wherein the voice snippets convey the content of the text of its associated response as displayed, but do not mirror the text exactly.

15. The process of Claim 1, wherein the text of a response as displayed represents an abbreviation of the words recorded in the corresponding voice snippet.

5 16. The process of Claim 2, wherein the hierarchy of menus comprises a first menu comprising responses representing greetings.

10 17. The process of Claim 16, wherein the hierarchy of menus further comprises a second menu comprising responses representing the basis for further conversation.

15 18. The process of Claim 17, wherein the responses available in the second menu comprise a response that the user is talking to the other party using a two-way voice communications process wherein the user responds by initiating the playback of voice snippets rather than talking directly.

20 19. The process of Claim 17, wherein the responses available in the second menu comprise open ended responses which when selected by the user cause a first additional menu to be displayed which comprises responses that are selected to continue or complete the open ended response selected in the second menu.

25 20. The process of Claim 19, wherein in lieu of or after selecting a non-open ended response from a displayed menu, the user can select a back command via the user interface, and wherein whenever the user selects the back command, performing the actions of:

inputting the back command; and
displaying the menu displayed immediately before the current menu in lieu of the currently displayed menu.

21. The process of Claim 19, wherein the first additional menu comprises responses representing the specification of a time.

22. The process of Claim 21, wherein the first additional menu
5 comprises an open ended response which when selected by the user causes a second additional menu to be displayed which comprises responses that are selected to continue or complete the open ended time specification response selected in the first additional menu.

10 23. The process of Claim 22, wherein the second additional menu comprises open ended responses which whenever selected by the user cause a third additional menu to be displayed which comprises responses that are selected to complete the open ended time specification response selected in the second additional menu.

15 24. The process of Claim 23, further comprising and action of, whenever a response is selected from the third additional menu to complete a time specification statement, displaying the second menu in lieu of the third additional menu.

20 25. The process of Claim 23, wherein in lieu of selecting a response from the third additional menu, the user can select a back command via the user interface, and wherein whenever the user selects the back command, performing the actions of :

25 inputting the back command; and
displaying the second menu in lieu of the third additional menu.

26. The process of Claim 1, wherein the process action of accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected response, comprises
30 an action of accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet in a language other than that of the text of the response as displayed.

27. The process of Claim 26, wherein a plurality of pre-recorded voice snippets corresponding to a selected response are available, each of which is in a different language, and wherein the user can select the language of the voice snippet that is accessed prior to selecting the response.

28. The process of Claim 16, further comprising the process actions of:
providing a plurality of backchanneling responses which are selectable by the user via the user interface;

10 displaying a menu of the backchanneling responses whenever the user selects a back command via the user interface when the first menu is displayed in the display of the communication device; and
upon selection of one of the backchanneling responses by the user,

15 accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected backchanneling response, and
transmitting a playback of the accessed voice snippet to the remote party over the communication link.

20 29. A system for conducting two-way voice communications between a user and a remote party wherein the remote party speaks but the user does not, comprising:

25 a communication device comprising a computing device, a user interface and a display, wherein the communication device is capable of establishing a communication link between the user and the remote party;

a computer program comprising program modules executable by the computing device, wherein the computing device is directed by the program modules of the computer program to,

30 display a menu listing a plurality of potential responses on the display of the communication device, said responses being selectable by the user via the user interface, and

upon selection of one of the responses by the user,
access a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to
the selected response, and

- 5 transmit a playback of the accessed voice snippet to
the remote party over the communication link.

30. The system of Claim 29, wherein the communication device
comprises a cell phone, the user interface comprises a keypad of the cell phone,
and the display comprises a display of the cell phone.

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31. The system of Claim 30, wherein the program module for
displaying the menu listing the plurality of potential responses comprises a sub-
module for displaying adjacent to each response a number or symbol each of
which corresponds to a different one of the keypad buttons, and wherein the
15 user selects a response from the menu by depressing the corresponding button
on the keypad.

20 32. The system of Claim 30, wherein the keypad comprises a cancel
button, and wherein the computer program further comprises a program module
for terminating the playback of a voice snippet whenever a user activates the
cancel button.

25 33. The system of Claim 29, wherein the display of the communication
device is limited to displaying six response choices.

30 34. The system of Claim 29, wherein the communication device further
comprises a memory for storing the voice snippets associated with each
response, and wherein the program module for accessing the pre-recorded voice
snippet corresponding to the selected response, comprises a sub-module of
accessing the voice snippet from the cell phone memory.

35. The system of Claim 29, wherein the communication link is provided by a service provider, and wherein the voice snippets are stored on a memory of a computing device controlled by the service provider, and wherein the program module for accessing the pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected response comprises the service provider accessing the voice snippet from the memory of the service provider's computing device, and wherein the program module for transmitting the playback of the accessed voice snippet to the remote party over the communication link comprises the service provider transmitting the playback of the voice snippet.

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36. The system of Claim 30, wherein the cell phone has a silent mode wherein the user is alerted to an incoming call by vibration of the cell phone, and wherein the system for conducting two-way voice communications is activated automatically whenever a voice communication is received by the user and the cell phone is in silent mode.

37. The system of Claim 30, further comprising program modules for: associating each of a plurality of backchanneling responses to a different button of the keypad which are selectable by the user via the keyboard; and,

upon selection of one of the backchanneling responses by the user depressing the corresponding key on the keypad,

accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected backchanneling response, and

transmitting a playback of the accessed voice snippet to the remote party over the communication link.

38. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for enabling a communication device having a computing device, user interface and display to conduct two-way voice communications between a

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user and a remote party over a communication link, wherein the remote party speaks but the user does not, said computer-executable instructions comprising:

displaying a menu listing a plurality of potential responses on the display of the communication device, said responses being employed by the user to communicate with the remote party;

displaying at least one additional menu on the display of the communication device upon selection of a response from a currently displayed menu, which together with the original menu form a hierarchy of menus used to construct complete statements when selected responses from each menu

displayed are played back in the sequence they were selected;

providing a plurality of backchanneling responses which are selectable by the user via the user interface; and,

upon selection of one of the menu or backchanneling responses by the user employing the user interface of the communication device,

accessing a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected response, and

transmitting a playback of the accessed voice snippet to the remote party over the communication link.

20 39. The computer-readable medium of Claim 38, further comprising an instruction for, whenever a user selects a menu or backchanneling response and then subsequently selects another menu or backchanneling response prior to the former response being completely played back, terminating the playback of the former response and transmitting a playback of the latter response instead.

25 40. The computer-readable medium of Claim 38, further comprising instructions for:

whenever a user selects a menu or backchanneling response and then subsequently selects a back command via the user interface prior to the former response being completely played back,

displaying the menu displayed immediately before the current menu in lieu of the currently displayed menu, and terminating the playback of the former response.

- 5 41. A system for conducting two-way voice communications between a user and a remote party wherein the remote party speaks but the user does not, comprising:
- 10 a communication device comprising a computing device and a keypad input device, wherein the communication device is capable of establishing a communication link between the user and the remote party;
- 15 at least one printed menu listing a plurality of potential responses, each of which identifies a key of the communication device's keypad that corresponds to that response;
- 20 a computer program comprising program modules executable by the computing device, wherein the computing device is directed by the program modules of the computer program to,
- upon user-selection of a key of the keypad associated with one of said responses,
- access a pre-recorded voice snippet corresponding to the selected response, and
- transmit a playback of the accessed voice snippet to the remote party over the communication link.

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